
“The Lord Stood with Me”

2 Timothy 4:9-22

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⁹Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹²I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

¹⁴Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

¹⁶At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

¹⁹Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. ²¹Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

²²The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

This is the final message in 2 Timothy, and these are the final words of the Apostle Paul that are preserved for us in Holy Scripture. As he does in other letters, he ends this letter mentioning a bunch of people. A total of 17 people is mentioned here. We don't have the time to look at every single one of them, but we'll look at a few of them, so they can serve as an example of the kinds of people we will encounter as we engage in Christian ministry. Remember, even though this letter was written to Timothy, who was Paul's understudy, who was also a pastor, there are principles here that are applicable for all Christians. All Christians are called to Christian ministry. We are all in the Lord's service, exerting ourselves like an athlete, like a soldier, like a farmer.

One of the things we discover from lists like this is that Christian ministry is not a solo project. It is always done with others. Each person has their part, but we engage in this ministry together. So again, the example of a soldier is fitting. He doesn't fight alone; he fights with his fellow soldiers. Look at the extend of this shared ministry. Paul is in Rome, Crescens is in Galatia, Titus is in Dalmatia, Thycticus is in Ephesus, Erastus is in Corinth, Trophimus is in Miletus. Paul has his people everywhere, strategically placed, so that more ministry could be accomplished. He understood that he could not do it himself.

For those of you who are very skilled, experienced, competent...perhaps you have a lot of natural talents, and an efficiency when it comes to work, you must not fall into the trap of that old adage, "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself." That is not the Christian way. The Christian way is discipleship; it's about raising up the next generation; it's about partnering with others; it's about training and empowering others to do ministry alongside of you; it's about helping others discover their God-given spiritual gifts. Even someone as competent as the Apostle Paul, as capable as he was, as gifted as he was, he couldn't do it by himself. He never intended to. His plan was to involve others. That should be our aim too.

What else can we discover from this passage? We see that Paul is human. As strong of a Christian as he was, he is still a weak and needy human being, as is the case with all of us. Paul's been abandoned. He says in v16 "no one came to my support, but everyone's deserted me. He's been betrayed. He says in v10, Demas has deserted me. He's been attacked. In v14 he says, "Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm." What he desires in the situation that he is in, is the companionship of fellow Christians, especially in his final days. He says to Timothy, "Do your best to come to me quickly." Then he says, "Bring Mark with you." Earlier in the letter he praised Onesiphorus, for seeking him out, finding him, and bringing him refreshment. He sought out Paul and he stood beside him.

You and I must also acknowledge that we need others to support and sustain us, especially in trying times. That's why this COVID lockdown has been so difficult on so many. We need the help and support of our friends. We need in-person fellowship and relationship; we need to receive the in-person ministry that can't be replaced by a text message, a phone call, or even a video chat. We need to serve and to be served. So, we have to be careful that we don't isolate ourselves or start feeling sorry for ourselves. Like Paul, we have to reach out to our Christian friends, and say, "I need help, I need to talk, I need your support, I need you to pray for me, I need to meet with you." Beware, during this pandemic, of getting too comfortable with being isolated. It is not good for your soul, it is not good for your mental health, and it is not good for your spiritual lives. Each of us has something to give and each of us has something to receive, things that can only be done in face-to-face encounters with others in the faith.

What I also found remarkable in these concluding words of Paul is what he asks Timothy to bring to him. Look with me to v13. He says, "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments." One commentator says that the scrolls were like our modern-day books. These were items that had something already written in them. The parchments would be like our modern-day notebooks, empty, something in which Paul could write. What were on those scrolls? We can't say with any certainty, but it could have been the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Or, it could have been something that Paul had written down in a notebook. The parchments, the empty notebook, what would that have been for. It might have been for journaling, or to write more letters, or to write down theological ideas and thoughts.

What's remarkable is that he knows his days are numbered. He's well aware that this imprisonment will result in his execution, and yet in his final days, he wants his Bible, and he wants pen and paper to study, perhaps to write letters. Throughout this letter Paul has been encouraging Timothy to focus on the word of the God, the Scriptures. These Scriptures can make us wise unto salvation. These Scriptures are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

Let's learn from this giant in the faith. Let's follow his example, in longing for the Scriptures more than anything. Jesus taught us that, man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Here's what else we see in this passage. We see different kinds of people in Paul's list, and we can expect to see the same kinds of people in our lives as well.

First, there are those who have abandoned the faith. The passage begins with a man named Demas. Demas was a person who worked alongside of Paul. He's mentioned in Colossians and Philemon, at the end of those letters, as Paul wraps up his final greetings. In Philemon, he refers to Demas, along with others, as his fellow worker. He was a partner in Christian ministry, but look at what Paul says of him, just several years later. In his first imprisonment, Demas was with him. In his second imprisonment, Demas had abandoned him. And Paul makes it clear why he did so. He loved the world. We can only speculate what was going on in the mind of Demas. But actually, what Paul said was enough. "He loved the world." If anyone abandons Christ, it is because they love the world more than they love Christ, is it not?

This is the specific reason why he wants Timothy to come to him quickly, "FOR Demas deserted me." Demas must have been very close, a very trusted ministry partner, and his desertion must have hurt Paul deeply. That's why he wants Timothy to get to him as quickly as he can.

Jesus had a betrayer in Judas. Paul had Demas. Who are we to think that we won't experience the same? There will be people that we labored alongside in the Gospel, that will abandon Christ, that will abandon us, and it'll hurt. But thankfully, we'll have others around us to comfort us.

Next, there are those who have been restored. In verse 11 Paul says, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry." Who is Mark? Mark was likely to Peter, what Timothy was to Paul. Mark, who is also called John Mark, wrote the gospel of Mark, which was the very first gospel to be written, the same gospel that Matthew and Luke used as a reference, when they wrote their gospels, but even before the writing of his gospel, Mark is mentioned in the book of Acts. His mother's name was Mary. The early church, or at least part of the early church in Jerusalem, gathered at their home for prayer. So, it's very possible that their home was the location of one of the fist house churches. Well, Paul and Barnabas, in Acts 13, were commissioned by the church in Antioch, to embark on their first missionary journey to the Gentiles and they took along with them, none other than John Mark. He went along as their helper, but on that first missionary journey, in the city of Pamphylia, Mark abandoned the mission, he abandoned Paul and Barnabas, and went back home. They had to finish their mission one person short, without Mark.

When it was time for Paul and Barnabas to set off again, on their second journey, Barnabas suggested taking along Mark; let's give the boy a second chance. Paul basically said, "No way! I'm not taking Mark. He abandoned us last time. He'll probably do it again. I can't trust him." Paul and Barnabas had such a strong disagreement about Mark, that it led to them going separate ways. Barnabas continued the mission with Mark, and Paul continued the mission with Silas and then we don't hear about Mark, until we get to the letter to the Colossians. Paul's in prison, with a fellow Christian named Aristarchu and Mark is there, and it's possible that he too is imprisoned, but he may just have been there to support Paul.

Here's what Paul says about Mark to the Colossian church. "You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him." Was it at this meeting that Paul regained his confidence in Mark? In any case, by this time, Mark was already in Paul's good graces. And of all the people he wants Timothy to bring with him, while he's in prison, it's none other than John Mark, because he is helpful, profitable, and useful to Paul in his ministry. Perhaps there were special ministry instructions that Paul wanted to give to him. Or maybe it was just his presence that helped him, comforted him and reassured him. Maybe he remembered how helpful Mark was during his first imprisonment and so he calls for Mark again.

All that to say that there will be people in ministry who will let us down but will rebound and get back up. We might be like Mark. We might have blown it, broken trust, lost credibility. Whether it's us or someone else, never write them off. You never know how God will restore them, and then use that failure to grow and mature them to a faith that's indistinguishable from what they were before.

Then there are enemies of the faith. Look with me to verse 14. Paul says,

Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵ You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. **(2 Timothy 4:14)**

Again, we don't know exactly what Alexander did, but he personally caused harm to the apostle. Maybe he was the one responsible for Paul's imprisonment. We don't know. But Paul says he's one of those people we should be on guard against. We should watch out for people like him, who are actively looking to oppose and destroy the faith. That person could be in your family, it could be in the workplace, that person can be on the campus, and sadly, that person could also be within the church. We are to be on guard against those who are actively opposing the faith. Paul, however, knows that ultimately, Alexander is in the hands of God. He says that the Lord will repay him for what he has done.

That's the same attitude we must have. For sure, we should be on guard against people like that, but there can be many situations where it's beyond our ability to do anything about it. We can't silence them. They may be in positions of influence and power. Revenge is not something we Christians can do. That's not an option for us. Thus, we have to trust that the Lord will take vengeance.

Finally, there are faithful partners in the faith. There are many people that Paul mentions here. Of course, there's Timothy, and then in verse 19 he mentions Priscilla and Aquila, the entire household of Onesiphorus, Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia. Just consider for yourselves, the many people who are laboring alongside of you for the work of the Gospel. Think of how we as a church support our ministry partners around the globe through finances, prayers, and moral support. Think of the different ministries in the church, where each person does his or her thing, but it all comes together in a beautiful harmony, as we serve God together. No one is an island. We each make up a network of countless people to engage in the ministry of the Lord.

Let's get back to Paul. He is virtually alone in prison. He says that Luke is with him. Luke has been a trustworthy and faithful companion, but practically everyone else is gone. Some painfully deserted him like Demas. Some of them were his enemies and the enemies of Christ. Many were off to different cities, carrying out crucial and strategic Gospel ministry. But there's a person we haven't mentioned yet, which is the most important of all. And that person is the Lord. Look with me to verse 16.

As Paul was in prison, he had a first defense. That was probably like a pre-trial where the charges were laid against him. Insurrection, rioting, disturbing the peace, treason. All of these are possible charges. Or it could have been, as historians recorded, that Nero was looking for a group of people to blame for a fire that had started in the city. People accused Nero of being the one who set the fire, so he could rebuild a part of the city to his liking. But when people started to accuse him, he diverted the blame to Christians. Ancient historians say that these Christians in Rome were arrested and brutally tortured. Christians were sewn into the carcasses of animals to be attacked and eaten by ravenous beasts. They were put on posts and lit on fire, acting as lanterns to light the evening streets. Nero did terrible things to the Christians in Rome and perhaps, knowing that Paul was one of the ring leaders, he was arrested, tried, convicted and executed, but listen to what Paul says. At his first defense, no one was there, no one came to support him. Everyone deserted him. They were probably fearful of coming under the same fate. What Paul says next is remarkable. He says, "May it not be held against them." Who does that sound like? It sounds like something our Lord would have said at his trial and execution. We all remember what Jesus said, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

There is an important lesson for us to learn here. Most all of us will face a situation where someone we counted on, lets us down, whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether maliciously or inadvertently. Our natural instinct is to simmer with bitterness. It's to wallow in our hurt. You see when we do that, we're doing exactly the opposite of what Paul did. We are holding the offense against them, meaning, we are unwilling to forgive them. Friends, disappointment from people will happen, but our response must be, "May it not be held against them." Look within your heart. Is there someone who has hurt you? Are you remaining in your unforgiveness? Release that person to the Lord. God will avenge or he will forgive.

Then what does Paul say? Even though everyone deserted him, he says, "But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength." In his darkest, loneliest, neediest hour, who was there? The Lord was there and that was enough; his presence was sufficient. People of God, it is better to have the Lord at your side, than to have a hundred able friends. Is that how you feel? Or would you rather trade the Lord for your friends? There may come a time in your life, when everyone has abandoned you, or for whatever reason, you are all alone or you feel all alone and at that time, God will keep his promise. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus will keep his promise, "Surely I will be with you to the very end of the age." and the Spirit will keep his promise, "He will be in you to move you to follow God's decrees and be careful to keep his laws." (**Ezekiel 36:27**), but look at the purpose of the presence of the Lord with Paul. Even in his final days, even while in prison, what does he care about, why does he need the presence of the Lord? So that he would be strengthened and why does he need to be strengthened? So that through him, the message of the Gospel might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it. To his dying breath, all he cares about is the spread of the Gospel.

What can we gain from this? Christian ministry never ends. You and I may retire from our careers, but we never retire from our ministry. We never retire from sharing the Gospel with those who are not saved. We never retire from being involved in missionary work. We never retire from discipling new believers. We never retire from ministering amongst God's people in the church. Some of us are getting older and retirement is but a few years away. How are you planning for your retirement? Commit your final years to the Lord's service. Start praying about it now, for the Lord will guide you in this.

Second, remember that the ultimate deliverance is not to be delivered from trials or from sickness or from bad people or from difficult situations. That is NOT the ultimate deliverance. The ultimate deliverance is deliverance from hell. It's to make it safely to the Lord's heavenly kingdom. Look at verse 18. Paul writes, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

What's strange is that Paul is saying these words, while knowing what awaits him, not rescue from Nero's prison, nor from the executioner's sword. What could Paul be talking about? Here's what Paul is thinking, and I know he's thinking this, not only because of what he says here, but what he's said in the rest of his letters. He's thinking of heaven. Paul is saying, whatever happens in this lifetime, whether he goes on living or whether he dies the death of a martyr, it's all for the glory of the Lord. And even if he does die, that death will result in an immediate, 'front-of-the-line' pass, to safely entering the Lord's heavenly kingdom. As the sword drops upon his head, Paul is defiant against the enemies of Christ, saying that even in my dying the Lord will deliver me. I will be in heaven, and the ministry of the Gospel will continue. Either way, I win!

That's the kind of assurance and confidence we can all have, when we know that the Lord is with us, and he is. So, let's receive Paul's final words, in our living and in our dying, "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all."

Let's pray.